Yukon

Government of Yukon

Yukon Government NEWS release

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Social Assistance Reform Complete

WHITEHORSE - Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers today announced changes to the social assistance regulations that finalize the government's Social Assistance Reform.

"The goal of Social Assistance Reform was to implement our commitment to review the social assistance program to ensure adequacy of rates, and provide incentives to recipients to help them enter the workforce and scale the welfare wall," Cathers said.

Changes to the regulations are broad, and include providing an increased incentive to assist recipients in entering the workforce, raising the amounts recipients receive for basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing, and reducing red tape for persons with severe disabilities.

"The most significant improvement we made to the social assistance structure changes the earned income exemption to help recipients enter the workforce, and become self-reliant," added Cathers.

Targeting the nearly 70% of recipients who have been on and off of social assistance, the three-month waiting period for the earned income exemption has been eliminated and working recipients will be able to keep $2 out of every $4 earned, rather than $1 out of $4 under the old structure. The re-entry period is available for a maximum of three years, recognizing that clients who are able to remain in the workforce

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for two years or more typically never return for social assistance again.

The changes announced today are in addition to two initiatives already implemented to help low-income Yukoners - increases to the Child Care Subsidy and to the Yukon Child Benefit.

The change to the earned income exemption takes effect June 1, 2008 and the rate increase takes effect July 1, 2008.

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Below: Backgrounder

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Social Assistance Backgrounder

What changes have been made? The main changes are to the earned income exemption, Social Assistance benefit rates and services to people with disabilities. They are outlined below.

Earned Income Exemption. This change will allow social assistance recipients to retain a higher percentage of their employment income without it affecting their eligible social assistance benefits.

- If a person is determined to be eligible for SA, they will also be eligible for an earned income exemption.

- Earned income exemption will increase from 25% to 50%, meaning a client can keep 50% of their monthly income from employment or self employment, without their SA benefits being reduced.

- They can keep 50% of their pay for a maximum of three years, after which the deduction goes down to 25%.

2. Increase Social Assistance Rates. This increase will better reflect the actual cost of goods, rent, utilities and other necessary items and services in Yukon. Rate increases vary on where the recipient lives, and their living situation (children, married, etc.).

Whitehorse Rates - Monthly

Single Person on SA	**Current**	**New – July 1, 2008**
Shelter	$390	$492
Food	$159	$201
Fuel & Utilities (average per month)	$250 (average per month)	$385 (average per month)
Clothing	$56	$71
Incidentals	$40	$51

Whitehorse Rates - Monthly

Family of Four (with two children, between six and 14 years)	**Current**	**New- July 1, 2008**
Shelter	**$640**	**$807**
Food	**$636**	**$804**
Fuel & Utilities (average per month)	**$325 (average per month)**	**$469 (average per month)**
Clothing	**$170**	**$216**
Incidentals	**$117**	**$148**

3. **Enhance services and reduce red-tape for persons**

with severe disabilities on social assistance. For persons on social assistance who have a severe disability, often observed as having extreme difficulty being able to function on a day-to-day basis without support, highly prone to victimization, a profound inability to make safe decisions regarding their well-being; the disability is more than likely lifelong and can not be remediated with interventions such as treatment or medications. The regulatory changes made will enable more flexibility in meeting the needs of disabled recipients.

As an example, the requirement to apply monthly for social assistance can be waived, additional supports or services not available through other programs could be purchased.

Changes include:

- The possibility of waiving the monthly application requirement.
- Ability to pay for additional benefits that would enhance community inclusion. (For example, a pass to the Canada Games Centre).

When do the changes take effect?

All changes take effect June 1, 2008, with the exception of the rate increase, which will be effective July 1, 2008.